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SUBJECT: KHALILZAD AND ISCI LEADER AL-HAKIM DISCUSS IRAQI POLITICAL OUTLOOK

REF: A. (A) BAGHDAD 3782
¶B. (B) BAGHDAD 3791

Classified By: Classified by Amb. Ryan Crocker for reasons 1.5 (b) and (d).

¶1. (C) Summary: Leading Shi'a politician Abdelaziz al-Hakim, president of the Islamic Supreme Council of Iraq (ISCI), told visiting USUN Amb. Khalilzad that his party would step up political reform efforts in the coming year, hinting that ISCI might support a vote of no-confidence against the Maliki government. Hakim also underlined ISCI's efforts to advance national reconciliation, citing symbolically important reciprocal visits between top ISCI officials and Sunni tribal leaders in different regions of Iraq. Hakim expressed hope that Iraq could be removed from Chapter VII status with the expiry of the UN mandate at the end of the year. Amb. Khalilzad affirmed that the U.S. would work to help Iraq in the UN, starting first with efforts to protect Iraqi assets against international tort claims. Hakim hoped U.S. relations with Tehran would improve with the new administration. End summary.

¶2. (C) USUN Amb. Zalmay Khalilzad met on December 2 with Sayyed Abdelaziz al-Hakim, President of the (Shi'a) Islamic Supreme Council of Iraq (ISCI) at ISCI headquarters in Baghdad. Al-Hakim, one of Iraq's most prominent political personalities, appeared tired and emaciated from the chemotherapy treatment he has been receiving in Tehran for his lung cancer, but was completely lucid and fully engaged in the conversation.

Protecting Iraqi Assets

¶3. (C) Amb. Khalilzad thanked Al-Hakim for his role in assembling parliamentary support for the recent ratification of the U.S.-Iraq Status of Forces Agreement. "Knowing the history of Iraq and the region, I recognize that this was not easy," Amb. Khalilzad underlined. On the next steps forward for Iraq on the multilateral level, Amb. Khalilzad affirmed that the U.S. was committed to help Iraq protect its assets from international tort claims, which might become vulnerable after the expiration of UNSCR 1770.

ISCI to Push Political Reform

¶4. (C) Referring to the political reform resolution (widely viewed as a parliamentary rebuke to the Maliki Government) Ref A) passed by parliament just before it ratified the SoFA, Hakim asserted "we intend to activate these principles in the near future." (COMMENT: This may have been an allusion to a vote of no-confidence against Maliki that many observers expect the opposition to organize soon after the provincial elections at the end of January 2009. END COMMENT.) Hakim was optimistic that the establishment of new inter-partisan working groups formed to tackle outstanding challenges on

issues like constitutional reform, center-provincial governance, and economic development would help break down the political impasse which continues to hinder progress in Iraq.

ISCI Building Bridges to Sunnis

15. (C) Responding to Amb. Khalilzad's question about the future of sectarianism in Iraqi politics, Hakim asserted that ISCI is actively pursuing national reconciliation at the grass roots level. He noted that his son Ammar and other senior ISCI figures had paid conciliatory visits to Samara, Tikrit, and other Sunni strongholds, and had also invited Sunni tribal leaders to visit Najaf, Amarah, and Basra in Iraq's Shi'a heartland.

Escaping Chapter VII

16. (C) Hakim asked whether Iraq could be removed from Chapter Q6. (C) Hakim asked whether Iraq could be removed from Chapter VII status, with the expiration of the UN mandate at the end of 2008. Amb. Khalilzad said the U.S. would work to help Iraq resolve its Chapter VII status, but the process would take some time. Some UNSC resolutions pertaining to Chapter VII may expire on their own, while others may require affirmative action from the Council and/or Iraq to resolve, Amb. Khalilzad noted. Currently, USUN staff are working to assemble an inventory of actions that Iraq and the UN need to do to resolve the Chapter VII question, he advised.

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U.S. - Iran

17. (C) Noting Hakim's good ties with, and knowledge of, both the USG and the Iranian government, Amb. Khalilzad asked for advice to Washington on dealing with Tehran. Hakim said he believed there was a need to open direct dialogue between the U.S. and Iran, recalling Ahmedinejad's recent statement that he was ready to meet with President-elect Obama. Hakim believed progress could be made if the U.S. "finds a way to take Iranian interests into consideration."

Sacrifices and Achievements

18. (C) Reflecting on the approaching end of his years of work on the Iraq file, Amb. Khalilzad expressed appreciation for Hakim's efforts to realize peaceful political development in Iraq. Iraqis, and the Hakim family in particular, have paid a high price and sacrificed dearly to realize these improvements, he noted. Likewise, Amb. Khalilzad continued, the U.S. has invested enormously and sacrificed with blood to help realize a democratic transition in Iraq.

19. (C) Hakim told Amb. Khalilzad that Iraqis appreciate his long and hard work to improve their country and improve their lives. While huge problems remain, Hakim observed, there have also been major achievements. Security progress has been undeniable. Terrorist attacks still occur, he noted, "but we remember the days of 19-20 attacks every day," he recalled.

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